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ABSTRACT

Access to and availability of contraceptive methods in stores play an important role in the prevention of AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, and other sexually transmitted diseases. Although teens are generally knowledgeable about birth control, many encounter barriers when attempting to obtain contraceptive. Forty-five drug stores and 15 convenience stores were surveyed in the Washington, D.C., area for family planning method physical location, ease of locating (signs or labeling), pricing, and clerks' attitudes regarding teen purchase of contraceptives. Results showed that condoms were either difficult to locate, separate from other forms of birth control, or behind counters; prices of condoms varied greatly--from \$1.42 to \$2.99 per three pack; female teens encountered negative reactions when buying contraceptives 40 percent of the time, while male teens reported mostly positive experiences; and male store employees were the most likely to react negatively to teen contraception inquiries. The need for sexually active teens to obtain family planning must be recognized by society and must be addressed. Store policies should reflect this heightened awareness; teens must be allowed to purchase contraceptives conveniently and anonymously. (KM)

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**TEENS' SURVEY OF STORES IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ON
ACCESSIBILITY OF FAMILY PLANNING METHODS**

1988

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Teens' Survey of Stores in the District of Columbia on Accessibility of Family Planning Methods

Introduction

Easy access to and availability of family planning methods in stores can play an important role in the prevention of teenage pregnancy, the spread of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) that causes AIDS, as well as other sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis and gonorrhea.

While teenagers can best protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies by abstaining from sexual intercourse, over half of 16 year-olds nationwide are sexually active. In some major cities, the average age of intercourse drops to 12 years of age. Only one in seven teen women attending a family planning clinic do so before initiating sexual intercourse and most delay their visits to a clinic for an average of 11.5 months after first having intercourse. Many adolescents who are sexually active do not use contraceptives. Studies have found that, for unmarried sexually active women aged 15 to 19, 27% had never used any method of birth control, 39% had sometimes used a method, and 34% had consistently used a method.

Teens' lack of using contraception results in pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. More than one in every ten teenage women get pregnant each year and four in every ten females become pregnant before they turn twenty. Nearly one-half of all people treated for STDs are younger than 25. Each year, one in seven teenagers contracts a sexually transmitted disease. In addition, public health experts are concerned that teenagers are at high risk for being exposed to HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, due to teens' experimentation with sex and drugs. Over one-fifth of people with AIDS are aged 20 to 29. Because of the long latency period for the virus, many of these people probably were infected as teenagers.

The Center for Population Options' (CPO) Teen Council, a diverse group of teenagers from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, serve as spokespersons for teen concerns around reproductive health. They recognize the need for sexually active teens to obtain family planning methods easily and confidentially. Studies have found that while many teens have knowledge about contraception, they encounter barriers when trying to obtain it. In order to learn more about these barriers, the Teen Council and CPO staff designed a survey to investigate the accessibility of family planning methods to teens in District of Columbia's stores.

CPO's Teen Council hopes that the important results and recommendations from this study will be useful to individuals responsible for store policies on the purchase, placement and pricing of family planning methods.

Methodology

The research project was designed by the Teen Council and CPO staff to investigate how accessible non-medical contraceptive methods are to young people. The Teen Council listed the information they wanted to gather, particularly:

- *where non-medical contraceptives are physically located in the stores;
- *whether condoms and other family planning methods, such as contraceptive cream or foam, are located on the same shelf;
- *how teenagers are treated by store clerks when purchasing contraceptives;
- *how much condoms cost; and
- *whether there are signs in the stores showing where family planning methods are located.

CPO staff then designed a survey form to gather the information the Teen Council sought. The first survey form was pilot-tested by the teens and revised. The teens found the revised form easy to fill out and the data gathered by the form reliable.

The teens surveyed a total of 60 stores: 45 drugstores and 15 convenience stores. The teens decided to survey these types of stores after talking with friends and asking them where they buy condoms. The sample of stores surveyed was 30 percent of all drugstores and convenience stores listed in the C&P Yellow Pages. In the District of Columbia, 38 of the stores were in Northwest D.C., 13 in Northeast, 8 in Southeast, and one in Southwest. Stores were selected based on the following criteria: proportional representation of all quadrants within the District of Columbia based on the percentages of stores in each quadrant; representation of all different chains of drugstores; and location near teens' homes or schools, that is, stores that teens would frequent often. Each teen surveyed 10 stores.

Findings

Overall, teens found it difficult to find and buy contraceptives and females had more negative experiences buying contraceptives than males.

- *Despite the growing societal openness about condoms, in many stores, teens had to ask for them. Condoms were behind the counter at 35% of the drugstores and 32% of the conveniences (see Table 1).
- *While male teens generally had neutral or positive experiences interacting with store clerks, 40% of the female's interactions were negative. For example, one female was lectured that only "bad girls" bought condoms. At another store, the clerk refused to give directions on

where the condoms were located in the store. At several stores, the clerks laughed when one of the female teens asked about condoms.

*Male clerks were more likely than female clerks to respond negatively when a teen asked "Where are the condoms located?" Twenty-seven percent of the male clerks responded negatively to a teen, while 15 percent of the female clerks responded negatively.

*Prices varied greatly from store to store (See Table 3). The price of a package of three, lubricated condoms ranged from \$1.42 to \$2.99. Convenience stores tended to have lower prices than drugstores. Eighty-two percent of convenience stores had a package of three lubricated condoms for under \$2.25, while 60% of the drugstores had them for under \$2.25.

*The teens found it difficult to find where the condoms were located in the stores. Only 13% of the stores had signs that clearly marked where the contraceptives were located (e.g. signs which read Family Planning).

*One-half of the stores did not place condoms and other family planning methods, such as spermicides, on the same shelf.

Recommendations

The Teen Council and the Center for Population Options are urging drug and convenience stores to implement the following recommendations, designed to improve teenagers' access to contraceptives.

1) Place signs in the aisles to mark where contraceptives are located. Only 13% of the stores had signs that clearly marked where the contraceptives were located.

2) Place contraceptives where young people can buy them without having to ask for them. Teens had to ask for condoms in many of the stores. Condoms were behind the counter at 35% of the drugstores and 32% of the convenience stores.

3) Locate all family planning methods together. One-half of the stores did not place condoms and other family planning methods, such as spermicides, on the same shelf. Medical experts recommend that condoms and foam be used together for protection against pregnancy and HIV infection.

4) Treat young people, especially females, with the same respectful care given to older customers. While male teens generally had neutral or positive experiences interacting with

store clerks, 40% of the females' interactions were negative. Male clerks were more likely than female clerks to respond negatively when a teen asked, "Where are the condoms located?" Male clerks responded negatively 27% of the time and female clerks 15% of the time.

5) Provide pamphlets and other information on contraceptives and STDs. None of the stores surveyed had pamphlets on STDs, on how to use a condom or on family planning methods in general. Yet many youth need more information and could learn from pamphlets. Since some stores carry pamphlets on health issues such as high blood pressure or cancer, they could consider adding information on reproductive health as well.

Table 1
Location of Condoms in Stores

<u>Location</u>	<u>Drugstores</u>	<u>Convenience Stores</u>
Behind a Counter	36% (16)	32% (5)
By Pharmacy	20% (9)	NA
By Check-out Counter	4% (2)	0%
With Feminine Hygiene	9% (4)	27% (4)
With Men's Personal Hygiene	0%	7% (1)
Family Planning Section*	13% (6)	7% (1)
Other	13% (6)	0%
No Condoms	4% (2)	27% (4)
Total	100% (45)	100% (15)

*Family Planning Section was identified in each store with a sign.

Table 2
Location of Other Family Planning Methods in Stores

<u>Location</u>	<u>Drugstores</u>	<u>Convenience Stores</u>
Behind a Counter	16% (7)	0%
By Pharmacy	20% (9)	NA
By Check-out Counter	2% (1)	0%
With Feminine Hygiene	25% (11)	40% (6)
With Men's Personal Hygiene	NA	NA
Family Planning Section*	11% (5)	7% (1)
Other	13% (6)	0%
No Methods	13% (6)	53% (8)
Total	100% (45)	100% (15)

*Family Planning Section was identified in each store with a sign.

Table 3
Cost of Condoms
Package of Three, Lubricated Condoms

<u>Price</u>	<u>Drugstores</u>	<u>Convenience Stores</u>
Less than \$2.00	51% (22)	36% (4)
Between \$2.01-\$2.25	9% (4)	46% (5)
Between \$2.26-\$2.50	12% (5)	0%
Between \$2.51-\$2.75	7% (3)	9% (1)
Between \$2.76-\$3.00	12% (5)	9% (1)
Unknown Price	9% (4)	